

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
 DATE 7/2/85
 TO Mr. Murphy
 FROM Mr. Schmeizer
 SUBJECT November 17, 1977
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Dear Mr. Murphy:

I refer to your letter of October 27 requesting clarification of the U.S. position on the upgrading and sale of weapons to Arab nations.

With respect to our arms sales to Saudi Arabia, it is the judgment of this Administration that Saudi Arabia has acted as a moderating force regarding the Middle East peace efforts and on oil pricing and supply. U.S.-Saudi cooperation, based on mutual confidence, serves our broader concerns on issues of vital importance to peace and stability in the Middle East and to international economic welfare. A continuing U.S. role in meeting the legitimate defense needs of Saudi Arabia is an integral part of that cooperation.

Saudi Arabia is a vast country with the largest petroleum reserves in the world and one of the smallest military forces of any major country in the Middle East. Its military force structure is defensively, not offensively, oriented.

The United States has for many years worked with the Saudi Government in developing its military defenses in a systematic fashion consistent with its sizable territory and limited manpower. Appropriate emphasis has been placed on developing a credible air defense system. In this connection the Saudi Government has requested the purchase of a number of F-15 aircraft. The F-15 would replace the aging British Lightnings now in the Saudi inventory and fulfill the defensive air-to-air intercept mission the Lightning has fulfilled for over 15 years. The Ford Administration agreed to sell the Saudis an advanced fighter; the Saudis, after a study of the various alternatives, chose to request the F-15. Careful review has determined that a legitimate military requirement exists.

The Honorable
 John P. Murphy,
 House of Representatives.

It should be noted that the Saudis have never engaged in an armed conflict with Israel nor have they transferred U.S. military equipment to any of the confrontation states.

With regard to the involvement of U.S. firms in the repair of Soviet-made MIG aircraft owned by Egypt, what is actually involved in this proposal is the sale to a foreign company by American companies of certain technical service information on the maintenance of the MIG-21 fighters now in the Egyptian inventory. This information would supplement information about the MIG fighters these foreign companies already have. The foreign companies would perform the actual maintenance services for the Egyptian Air Force. There would be no direct U.S. Government participation nor would U.S. Government funds be used in implementing this project. The Department of State would, of course, have to approve any contract concluded between the U.S. and foreign firms before any information could be transferred.

In deciding that this proposal was in the best interests of the United States, we took several factors into consideration. Egypt has played a moderate and constructive role in our effort to bring about a Middle East peace. Under the leadership of President Sadat, Egypt has made a decisive turn to the West and has drastically reduced its cooperation with the Soviet Union. As a result, the Soviet Union has virtually ceased all arms shipments to Egypt and has stopped maintaining the equipment that is already there.

In addition, the proposed refurbishing will not, in any significant way, change the military balance in the Middle East. It is not designed to enhance the basic capabilities of the MIG-21, but only to return them to their original capability. No country can permit its military establishment to decline indefinitely, and Egypt has asked the United States and other friendly Western countries to assist them in alleviating some of the negative effects of their break with the Soviet Union.

This Administration has, as you know, adopted a policy of restraint in arms sales worldwide. This policy recognizes

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at the same time, our need to assist our friends and allies in their legitimate defense needs. This includes Saudi Arabia and Egypt. We believe that it is in the interest of the United States and in the interest of peace in the Middle East for us to help in this way.

Sincerely,

Douglas J. Bennet, Jr.
Assistant Secretary
for Congressional Relations

Drafted: NEA/ARP:BBodine/NEA/EGY:KEHonan
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